

2001-Eckhart-Tolle-Ripples-on-Surface-of-Being-interview-with-Andrew-Cohen

[Speaker 3] (0:00 - 0:09)

W. I. E.

Unbound presents Ripples on the Surface of Being, an interview with Eckhart Tolle. Part 1.

[Speaker 2] (0:11 - 0:39)

I know, you know, in the few moments, in just a few moments that we've been speaking together, you indicated in so many words that you spend a lot of time by yourself in solitude of one sort or another. So, I wanted to ask you just a little bit about what your life was like and, because I've heard you're a little bit of a recluse, but I don't know if that's true. Right.

[Speaker 1] (0:39 - 2:08)

In a way, that has been true in the past. Before the book came out, for many years, I was a recluse. And then my life, since the publication of the book, has changed dramatically.

So, I'm now really very much involved with teaching and traveling. And people who knew me before, when they see me now, they say, this is amazing because you used to be a hermit and now you're out in the world. And yet, I still feel that inside nothing has changed.

I still feel exactly the same as before. There's still a continuous sense of peace. And I'm surrendered to the fact that, on an external level, there's been a total change.

So, it's not actually true anymore that I'm a hermit. I used to be, but now I'm the opposite of a hermit. Now, this may well be a cycle.

It may well be that, at some point, this cycle will come to an end and I will become a hermit again. But at the moment, I'm surrendered to the fact that I'm almost continuously interacting. I do occasionally take time to be alone.

That is necessary, in between traveling, in between teaching and engagements.

[Speaker 2] (2:08 - 2:13)

Why is it that you need to take time to be alone? And what is it that happens when you take the time to be alone?

[Speaker 1] (2:18 - 2:33)

When I'm with people, I'm a spiritual teacher. That's a function, but it's not my identity. It's the moment I'm alone, my deepest joy is to be nobody.

[Speaker 2] (2:33 - 2:34)

Your deepest joy, you said?

[Speaker 1] (2:34 - 3:37)

Yes. It's to relinquish the function of teacher, which is only a function. It's not, I don't see it as an identity or my identity.

It's a temporary function. And the moment, let's say I'm seeing a group of people, the moment they leave me, that I'm suddenly alone, I'm no longer a spiritual teacher, there's no longer any sense of external identity. I simply go into the stillness more deeply.

So to be, the place that I love most is the stillness. And it's not that the stillness is lost when I talk or when I teach, but because the words arise out of the stillness. But when people leave me, there's only the stillness left, and I love that so much.

[Speaker 2] (3:38 - 3:40)

And so would you say you prefer it?

[Speaker 1] (3:41 - 6:23)

Not prefer. There's a balance now in my life, which perhaps wasn't there before, because when the inner transformation happened many years ago, I almost, one could almost say, a balance was lost. I almost, I got lost, I sometimes call it, I got lost in being completely.

It was so fulfilling and so blissful simply to be that I had lost all interest in doing or interacting. So one could say that for quite a few years a balance was lost in my life, I got lost in being, I had relinquished doing completely almost, just enough to keep myself alive, and even that was miraculous. And I had lost interest totally in future.

And then gradually a balance re-established itself, and it didn't re-establish itself fully until I started writing the book and now. The way I feel now is that there is a balance in my life between being alone and interacting with people, between being and doing, they are now completely balanced. Whereas before, the doing was relinquished, and there was only being, blissful, profound, beautiful.

But from an external viewpoint, many people thought something had happened to me, I had become unbalanced or mad, some people thought I was mad, to have let go of all the worldly things that I had, quote, achieved, not wanting or needing any of that anymore. So that's the balance now, also between aloneness and meeting with people.

And that's quite good, and I'm quite attentive to that so that the balance doesn't get lost.

There's now a pull towards increasing doing, people want me to talk here and talk there, and constant demands. So I know that I need to be attentive now so that the balance is not lost, and I don't get lost in doing, I don't think it would ever happen. But it requires a certain amount of vigilance.

[Speaker 2] (6:24 - 6:26)

And what would it mean to get lost in doing?

[Speaker 1] (6:26 - 7:16)

Well, theoretically it would mean that I continuously interact with people, I travel and teach, and perhaps if that happened, at some point the flow, the stillness, might not be there. I don't know, it may always be there. But I feel now that I need to return to the pure stillness periodically, and then just allow, when the teaching happens, allow it to rise out of the stillness.

So the teaching and stillness are very closely connected too. Of course. So the teaching arises out of the stillness.

When I'm alone, there's only the stillness, and that is my favorite place.

[Speaker 2] (7:16 - 7:21)

And when you're alone, do you spend a lot of time physically being still?

[Speaker 1] (7:21 - 7:52)

Yes, I can sometimes sit for two hours just in a room with almost no thought, just complete stillness. Sometimes when I go for walks also there's complete stillness. There's no mental labeling of sense perceptions.

There's simply a sense of awe or wonder or openness. And that's beautiful.

[Speaker 2] (8:00 - 8:15)

Okay. In your book, *The Power of Now*, you state that the ultimate purpose of the world lies not within the world but in transcendence of the world. Could you explain what you mean?

Yeah.

[Speaker 1] (8:20 - 9:54)

Transcending the world does not mean to withdraw from the world, to no longer take

action, or to stop interacting with people. Transcendence of the world is to act and to interact without any self-seeking. In other words, without seeking to enhance one's sense of self through one's action or one's interaction with people.

So ultimately what it means is not needing the future anymore for one's fulfillment or one's sense of self or being. So there's no seeking through doing, seeking an enhanced or more fulfilled or greater sense of self in the world. When that seeking isn't there anymore then you can be in the world but not be of the world.

You're not seeking for any identifications anymore in anything that you encounter out there.

[Speaker 2] (9:54 - 10:04)

So you were saying that you're no longer seeking to gain anything from it? Yes. So one hasn't given up an egotistical, materialistic relationship to the world?

[Speaker 1] (10:05 - 11:36)

Yes, especially not to gain a sense of self, a deeper or enhanced sense of self, because in the normal state of consciousness what people are looking for through their activity is to be more completely themselves. They're all looking for that. The bank robber is looking for it in some way.

The person who is striving for enlightenment is also looking for it because he is seeking to attain a state of perfection, a state of completion, a state of fullness at some point in future. So there is this seeking to gain something through one's activities. And that self-seeking, really seeking, they're seeking themselves, or you could say God, which comes to the same thing.

They're seeking for themselves and they're seeking where it can never be found in the normal state of consciousness. That means they are off the world. They are in the world and off the world.

You're looking for it in time. Yes, yes. The world and time are so intrinsically connected.

So it's the self-seeking in time. When that ceases, then you can be in the world without being off the world.

[Speaker 2] (11:44 - 11:59)

So just to go back to the question, when you say the ultimate purpose of the world lies not within the world but in transcendence of the world, what do you exactly mean that the purpose of the world lies in the transcendence of it?

[Speaker 1] (11:59 - 22:32)

Yes, everybody seems to need to go through the process when one loses oneself in the world. One, the world promises fulfillment somewhere in time, so there's a striving towards that fulfillment in time. And then the striving continues, becomes more intense, more acute.

Many times people feel, yes, now I have arrived, and then realize, no, they haven't arrived. So the striving continues. Expressed beautifully in the Course in Miracles where it says, the dictum of the ego is, seek but do not find.

So there's that continuous striving. And ultimately suffering arises through that, through not finding. And through that, that is the beginning of an awakening when the realization dawns that perhaps this is not the way.

Perhaps I will never get to where I'm striving. Perhaps it's not in the future at all. So after having been lost in the world, suddenly, often through the pressure of suffering, the realization comes that the answers may not be found out there in worldly attainment and not even in the future.

So before there had been an identification with situations and people and attainment and things, seeking, because the ego, the mentally derived sense of self, always seeks to grow and enhance itself through identifications. So there's a grasping for identifications, and that builds up the ego. But also it's never fulfilling.

It's never enough. And the more the identifications accumulate, the heavier and more dense the ego becomes, the greater also the suffering that goes with that. And that eventually brings about the awakening.

It's through the suffering created by that. So what then arises is, first, there's a collapse of the sense of self that had been running the show, so to speak, for many years. It no longer works.

People arrive at a point where that no longer works for them. And often that's perceived as a personal crisis. That even people who have attained success may come to reach that point.

They may be at the height of their success and suddenly enter a crisis because they realize that wasn't it either. It's not fulfilling. They haven't found themselves.

Everybody tells them they're the greatest, and they still wake up in the middle of the night with a state of dread and fear. And that's an important point for many people to reach, that sense of deep crisis when the world as they have known it and the sense of self that they have known, that's identified with the world, you think, becomes meaningless. And then that happened to me.

And then there's the possibility of suicide comes very close at that point. And some

people actually do commit suicide. And I was just that close, just from suicide.

And then something else happened. A death happened of the sense of self that lived through identifications, mentally derived sense of self, identifications with my story, things around me, the world. Something arose at that moment that was a sense of deep and intense stillness and aliveness, beingness.

I later called it presence. And I realized beyond words that that is who I am, but it wasn't a mental process, that realization. I realized that that vibrantly alive deep stillness is who I am.

That is later, years later, I read books and I realized we could call that pure consciousness, whereas everything else is the conditioned consciousness. The human mind is the conditioned. Consciousness has taken form as thought.

The conditioned consciousness is all of the whole world that is created by the conditioned mind, is that. Everything is conditioned entities, objects. Everything is conditioned.

Consciousness has taken birth as a form and then that becomes the world. So to be lost in the conditioned seems to be necessary for humans. It seems to be part of their path.

To be lost in the world, to be lost in the mind, which is the conditioned consciousness, that seems to be the path. And then, due to the suffering that arises out of that, being lost, finding the unconditioned as oneself. Yes.

And that is why we need the world to transcend the world. Okay. So I am infinitely grateful for having been lost.

I understand, okay. And it's possible that this is also the meaning of when Jesus talks about the parable of the prodigal son, which usually is interpreted by the church in a different way. He talks about the parable of the prodigal son who leaves his father's home, which is a place of great wealth and joy and aliveness.

He says, no, I am going to be independent. I am going to make it my own. Give me my inheritance.

That's the story. He leaves and after a few years becomes poorer and poorer and destitute and even forgets his origin. It's a different version.

It's a Middle Eastern, actually, old Middle Eastern story. He forgets his origin and he becomes a beggar and destitute. And then his father sends messengers and says, don't you realize who you are?

And then returns home. So it's returning home after having been lost. This is not the same home that it is and it isn't the same home that you left perhaps a million years

ago.

Because now, after having been lost, you reenter it with full consciousness. That's why that home is so beautiful now. So the purpose of the world is for you to be lost in it, ultimately.

The purpose of the world is for you to suffer, to create the suffering, which seems to be what is needed for the awakening to happen. And then, once the awakening happens, comes also the realization that suffering is unnecessary now. You have reached the end of suffering because you have transcended the world.

It is the place that is free of suffering. So this seems to be everybody's path. Perhaps not everybody's path in this lifetime, but it seems to be a universal path.

What a spiritual teaching does, because even without a spiritual teaching or a spiritual teacher, I would believe that everybody would get there eventually. But that could take time, much longer. A spiritual teaching is there to save time.

And the basic message of the teaching is that you don't need any more time. And the basic message of the teaching is that you don't need any more suffering. And if you are ready to hear, I tell this to people who come to me, if you are ready to hear this, then you are ready for it, because I am speaking to you.

You are ready to hear it because you are hearing it. There are still a million people out here who are not hearing it, but I am not talking to them. If you are hearing that, you don't need time anymore and you don't need suffering anymore.

You have been seeking in time and you have been seeking suffering. You have been seeking further suffering. And suddenly to hear, I don't need that anymore.

For some people, that has been the moment of transformation. Now, to be ready to hear this, of course they need it. They have already suffered.

If they hadn't suffered enough, they wouldn't be here listening. The fact that they are here means they have suffered enough already. So the beauty of this spiritual teaching is that it saves lifetimes of...

[Speaker 2] (22:32 - 22:34)

Unnecessary suffering. Yes.

[Speaker 1] (22:38 - 23:10)

So, it's good that people are lost in the world. I enjoy traveling to New York and Los Angeles where it seems that people are still totally involved. I was looking out of the window in New York.

We were next to the Empire State Building doing a group. Really? Yes, right next to me.

And everybody was rushing, almost running. Everybody seemed to be in a state of intense nervous tension, anxiety.

[Speaker 2] (23:10 - 23:11)

That's New York.

[Speaker 1] (23:11 - 23:47)

Suffering, really, but it's not recognized as suffering. And I looked and said, where are they all running to? And, of course, they're all running to the future.

They're needing to get somewhere, which is not here. It's a point in time, not here, but then. They're running to a then.

They are in suffering, but they don't even know it. But to me, even watching that was joyful. I didn't feel, oh, they should know better.

Why don't they? They're on their spiritual path. At the moment, that is their spiritual path, and it works beautifully.

[Speaker 2] (24:00 - 24:11)

All right, so third question. In your own experience, is the world real? Is the world unreal?

Bob? All right.

[Speaker 1] (24:15 - 27:17)

Many people read in a book that an Indian sage says the world is unreal. Then that becomes a belief, and then they repeat it, and they have these discussions with others who say, no, no, this is obviously wrong. The world is real.

So all I can talk about is from my own experience of how I perceive that, and that is, even when I'm, let's say, when I'm interacting with people or walking in a city, doing ordinary things, there's always, the way I perceive the world is like ripples, and this is a way of putting it, ripples on the surface of being. Underneath the world of sense perceptions and the world of mind activity, there's a vastness of being. There's a vast spaciousness.

There's a vast stillness, and there happens, there's a little ripple activity on the surface, which isn't separate, just like the ripples are not separate from the ocean. So there is no separation, the way I perceive it. There's no separation between being and the manifested world.

In other words, between the manifested and the unmanifested. But the unmanifested is so much vaster and deeper and greater than what happens in the manifested, that whatever happens in the manifested is so fleeting, every phenomenon in the manifested is so short-lived and fleeting, that yes, one could almost say that from the perspective of the unmanifested, which is the timeless beingness or presence, all that happens in the manifested realm really seems quite, it's a play of shadows or it seems vapor or mist, continuously new forms arising and disappearing, arising and disappearing. So the one who is deeply rooted in the unmanifested to that being, the manifested could very easily be called unreal. I don't call it unreal because I see it is still, it is not separate from anything.

So it is real. All that is real is beingness itself. Consciousness is all there is, pure consciousness.

[Speaker 2] (27:17 - 27:46)

So therefore you're saying the definition of real would be free from birth and death. That's right. So only that which was not born and cannot die would be real.

Yes. And since the manifest world is ultimately not separate from the unmanifest, according to what you're saying, ultimately one would have to say it's real.

[Speaker 1] (27:47 - 27:57)

Yes. And even within every form and every form that is subject to birth and death, there is the essence of every form is the deathless.

[Speaker 2] (27:57 - 27:58)

Yes.

[Speaker 1] (27:58 - 28:15)

Even the essence of a blade of grass is the deathless. Yes. And that's why even the world of form is sacred.

It's not that the realm of the sacred is exclusively being or the unmanifested. Even the world of form, I see it as sacred.

[Speaker 2] (28:17 - 28:25)

Okay, so if someone simply asked you, very straightforward, is the world real or unreal, would you say it was simply real or would you have to qualify the statement?

[Speaker 1] (28:26 - 28:39)

I would probably qualify the statement. It's a temporary manifestation of the real.

[Speaker 4] (28:41 - 28:42)

Okay.

[Speaker 2] (28:45 - 29:02)

If the world is a temporary manifestation of the real, what is the enlightened relationship to the world? Right.

[Speaker 1] (29:03 - 34:04)

So to the unenlightened, the world is all there is. Yes. There is nothing else.

And so because the world is all there is to the unenlightened consciousness, the world holds enormous promise and poses a great threat at the same time. And so that is the dilemma of the unenlightened consciousness, is that it is torn between seeking, because seeking fulfillment, that's the promise of the world, seeking fulfillment in and through the world, and being threatened by it continuously and hoping that they will find themselves in it and at the same time knowing that the world is going to kill them. And that is the state of continuous conflict that the unenlightened consciousness is condemned to, being torn because that ultimately what it means is desire and fear.

Being torn continuously between desire and fear. Yes. Dreadful fate.

Yes. And then the enlightened consciousness is rooted in the unmanifested, really ultimately is one with it. It knows itself to be that.

It is the unmanifested, one could almost say it is the unmanifested looking out. Even with a simple thing like perceiving visually a form, a flower, a tree, perceiving that in a state of great alertness and deep stillness, at that moment already it is the unmanifesting. You are not a person anymore at that moment.

The unmanifested is perceiving itself in form. And it is always a sense of goodness in that perception. And then to be rooted continuously in that, not only as far as sense perceptions are concerned, but also in one's interactions with people, whenever action arises, never losing touch with the realm of vast stillness, that is the unmanifested consciousness.

So any action arises then out of that, and it has a completely different quality to it than action that arises out of the unenlightened consciousness, which is the human mind, which needs something and seeks something and needs to protect itself. And that is really where those intangible and precious qualities come in that we call love, joy, peace. They are all one with the unmanifested.

They arise out of that. No love and joy and peace are possible for those to whom the world is all there is. They may talk about it, they may seek it, they may try to be loving,

but it doesn't work.

Many Christians have done that because they read the scriptures, you must love your neighbor. Okay, I'm going to try. So then it is possible for a human being to be a blessing on the earth, a human being who lives in connectedness with that and then acts and interacts, that human being becomes a blessing on the planet.

Whereas the unenlightened human is very heavy on the planet, there is a heaviness to the unenlightened, and the planet is suffering. The planet is suffering from millions of unenlightened humans. That's true.

And the burden on the planet is almost too much to bear. I can sometimes feel it as the planet saying, oh, no more of this.

[Speaker 2] (34:09 - 34:46)

It's literally true. Yeah. Yeah.

Okay. So the simple answer to the question could be said that the enlightened manifest, the enlightened relationship to the world would occur naturally as long as one never lost touch with one's true nature. Yes.

Which is the unmanifest self.

[Speaker 1] (34:46 - 35:01)

Yes. That's right. And then also you don't need to live by principles anymore then because right action arises out of that.

Spontaneously. Yeah. That's rare.

[Speaker 2] (35:01 - 35:44)

Yeah. Yeah. Good.

Okay. Do you think that it's possible for spiritual practice, meditation, being in the now or whatever, to ever begin to yield the depth of understanding that has the power to truly liberate the individual from their attachments to the world unless that practice occurs, unless the meditation occurs on a firm foundation of liberating insight? In other words, can spiritual practice ever become truly deep and have the power to liberate unless one has already given up the world, at least to some degree?

[Speaker 1] (35:45 - 38:49)

So first I would say that no spiritual practice as such would ever get you there. It can be helpful. Yes.

But in itself it would not be enough. And in some cases spiritual practice doesn't happen at all. It is with any spiritual practice in the narrow sense of the word, a technique or a method, that would be the narrow sense of the word spiritual, but that is not your question.

But I'll just mention this briefly. Spiritual practice in the narrow sense of the word, it always gives you time because you need to practice it, become good at it. And so that in itself has its own built-in obstacle that would make sure that it doesn't work for you because you're given time, you're striving, it's a movement in time, becoming a good meditator.

It's only when there's complete surrender to the now, to what is, only then is liberation. Now, I do not believe that a practice would take you into complete surrender. Complete surrender happens usually through one's true living.

Something happens, your very life is the practice, is the ground where that happens. And then surrender for some people may not be complete, there may be a partial surrender, and then there may be an opening, and then they may engage in spiritual practice, and then the spiritual practice is of course much more effective than for a person who perhaps even goes to a spiritual practice for self-seeking reasons. So if there has already been partial surrender, and then they engage in spiritual practice, that would increase the effectiveness of the spiritual practice.

But even then, I do not believe that the practice would take you into total surrender. That is inseparable from your life. That is, your life is the practice for that.

If spiritual practice may help you a little while along the way, then it's relinquished. For true surrender to happen, even the spiritual practice needs to be relinquished. In some cases, the surrender happens without any practice.

It happened to me. So that is possible too. So, no spiritual practice, whether the spiritual practice comes after a certain degree of insight or surrender, has already happened.

Even if the spiritual practice comes, in itself, the practice alone, even then, won't do it. Surrender, and surrender can happen to the most unlikely people. It can happen to...

[Speaker 2] (38:50 - 39:44)

Yes, that's true. But the thing is, this is specifically... I mean, I agree with you completely.

This is just that... I mean, this is something I found in my own work. It's basically that unless spiritual experience...

Because people can have... Basically, people can have all kinds of spiritual experience, but unless there is... Unless the world has been seen through to a certain degree, and

unless there is a willingness, based on that seeing through, to let go of it, that the spiritual experience, no matter how powerful it is, is not going to lead to any kind of liberation.

That's right. That's basically my question.

[Speaker 1] (39:44 - 39:47)

That's right, and the willingness to let go is surrender.

[Speaker 2] (39:47 - 39:47)

Yes.

[Speaker 1] (39:49 - 39:56)

That's right, and that remains the key. Without that, no amount of practice, or even spiritual experience.

[Speaker 2] (39:56 - 40:09)

Yes, exactly. Because the point is, as you yourself know, a lot of people are, yeah, yeah, I want to meditate or do whatever, but their spiritual aspirations are not based on any willingness to let go of anything substantial.

[Speaker 1] (40:09 - 40:16)

That's right. In fact, it may be the opposite. Spiritual practice may be trying to find something new to identify with.

[Speaker 2] (40:16 - 40:19)

Yes, of course, right. But that was basically the point.

[Speaker 1] (40:19 - 40:20)

Yes, so we...

[Speaker 2] (40:21 - 40:22)

We basically agree.

[Speaker 1] (40:22 - 40:22)

Yes.

[Speaker 2] (40:22 - 40:39)

And in the context of the world, the real spiritual practice, the real spiritual experience

would ultimately, is meant to lead one to the letting go of the world, the transcendence of the world, the relinquishment of the attachment to the world, etc.

[Speaker 1] (40:39 - 42:01)

Yes, and now in concrete terms, what that means, because sometimes people may say, well, how do you get to that? It sounds wonderful, but how do you get there? In concrete terms, that simply means, and this is, I want to put it in words that everybody can understand, what that, that is the simple, and we can't call that practice because it's too simple for that.

It is the most basic. At its most basic, it is simply to say yes to this moment, is the state of surrender. A total yes to what is, not the inner no to what is.

And the complete yes to what is, is transcendence of the world. It's as simple as that. A total openness to whatever arises at this moment.

The usual state of consciousness for humans is to resist, to run away from it, to deny, to resist it, not to look at it.

[Speaker 2] (42:01 - 42:04)

So when you say being yes, you mean not avoiding anything, facing everything.

[Speaker 1] (42:04 - 42:04)

That's right.

[Speaker 2] (42:05 - 42:06)

There's nothing necessarily to do with action.

[Speaker 1] (42:06 - 42:09)

No. Okay. Welcoming this moment.

[Speaker 2] (42:10 - 42:11)

Not resisting it at all.

[Speaker 1] (42:11 - 43:09)

That's right. Embracing this moment, and that is the state of surrender. Okay.

And that is really all that's needed. The only difference between a master and a non-master is that the master embraces what is totally. And immediately, when there's non-resistance to what is, there comes, there's a peace.

The portal is open. The unmanifested is there. That is the most powerful way.

Yeah.

[Speaker 2] (43:13 - 43:14)

Good. We did it.

[Speaker 1] (43:14 - 43:15)

Thank you.

[Speaker 2] (43:18 - 43:19)

Hope you enjoyed it. I did.

[Speaker 1] (43:19 - 43:20)

I did. Thank you.